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Henrik  
Wergeland

the  
NORWEGIAN POET



*with*  
*translations by*  
ELLIT GRÖNDAHL



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# HENRIK WERGELAND

THE NORWEGIAN POET



*with Translations by*

ILLIT GRÖNDAHL,

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LONDON.

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# HENRIK WERGELAND

*with Translations by*

ILLIT GRÖNDAHL

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"I in bad spirits, did you say? <sup>1</sup> I, who need only a  
glimpse of the sun  
to break out into loud laughter from a joy I cannot  
explain?

When I smell a green leaf, dazed I forget poverty,  
riches, friends and foes.

My cat rubbing against my cheek smoothens all heart-  
sores.

Into my dog's eye I lower my sorrows as in a deep  
well.

My ivy has grown. Out of my window it has borne  
on its broad leaves  
all the memories I do not care to keep.

The first spring rain will fall on the leaves and wipe  
out some faithless names.

They will fall down with the drops and poison the  
burrows of the earth-worm.

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<sup>1</sup>These lines were written in reply to an editorial article in  
"Morgenbladet," which had declared that "Mr. Wergeland  
is angry and in bad spirits" (March, 1841).

I who read rapture in each petal of the hundred-leaved  
rose—  
me a poor paper should cause to quell one second  
with vexation?

That would be like killing sky-blue and rose-coloured  
butterflies.  
Such sin, verily, my heart recoils from.

It would be like strewing ashes on my head which is  
not yet grey,  
and throwing away the diamonds of sparkling seconds  
which Time yet sows thereon.

Come on, journalists! Sharpen your fox's claws on  
the rock!  
You only tear off flowers and a little moss for a soft  
grave.

Like the insect's sting in the mussel, insults breed  
pearls only in my heart.  
They shall one day adorn the diadem of my spirit.

I hate? When a bird flies over my head my hate is a  
thousand cubits hence.  
It melts away with the snow, it passes with the first  
waves from the shore and far out to sea.

But why should not my veins be wroth?  
Rob not the landscape of its rushing streams!  
Right honourable osiers, permit the brook to foam  
when it runs among boulders!

I love not blue sky everlasting, as I do hate stupid  
staring eyes.

Have I no heaven because it is full of drifting clouds,  
fairylands of the sun?

And if I had none—is not God's great and glorious  
enough?

Complain not under the stars of the lack of bright  
spots in your life!

Ha! Are they not twinkling as if they would speak  
to you?

How Venus sparkles to-night! Have the heavens  
also spring?

Now the stars have shone all thro' the winter; now  
they rest and rejoice. Hallelujah!

What riches for a mortal!

My soul rejoices in heaven's joy of spring, and shall  
take part in that of the earth.

It sparkles stronger than the vernal stars, and it will  
soon open with the flowers.

Glorious Evening Star! I uncover my head.

A crystal bath upon it falls thy sheen.

There is kinship between the soul and the stars.

It steps in the starlight outside the curtain face,  
whose folds have disappeared.

The rays cover my soul with a calmness like that of  
alabaster.

Like a bust it stands within me. Gaze into its features!

Now they are as you would have them. The scornful ones are laid.

My soul has but the mild smile of a corpse. Are you still afraid?

The rascal! The bust has a laughing heart beneath its calm.

Alas for your feeble fingers: you cannot get hold of *that!* " 1

This is Henrik Wergeland himself, the fair Norway giant, with his pipe and his bowl, beaming out of the window, through which Nature is beaming in to him. This man, whom we Norwegians deem our greatest lyrical poet, is hardly known beyond the skerry-guard rocks of his native country; and we cannot but feel that the world is poorer for it.

Henrik Wergeland himself more than once expressed a longing that he might have been born with a wider language. Thus, in the droll phrenological lecture forming the last of those bright autobiographical sketches, *Hassel-Nödder* (Hazel Nuts), which he kept Death waiting to write, he says:

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<sup>1</sup> *Digterverker og prosaiske Skrifter af Henrik Wergeland*, edited by H. Lassen, Vol. I. p. 361. This edition in six volumes. Copenhagen, 1886, is referred to throughout the following. The larger edition by Hartvig Lassen: *Henrik Wergeland's Samlede Skrifter*, Vol. I—IX, Kristiania, 1857, is out of print. A complete edition in 23 vols. is now being published by H. Jäger and D. A. Seip, Steenske Forlag, Kristiania, 1919.

“ . . . I was—and that was my misfortune with a language so restricted—nothing but a poet.”

A sense of this situation—a poet and prophet of universal import, with a message so significant to the world which is now forming, and himself yearning for the contact with all mankind—is responsible for the production of these translations; linked with notes on his life and work, in the hope that through a fairly literal translation gleams of the original may somehow reach readers of English, and perhaps draw to our poet some of the readers abroad of the language of Björnson and Ibsen.<sup>1</sup>

Henrik Arnold Wergeland was born at Kristiansand, on the south coast of Norway, the 17th June, 1808. His father, Nikolai Wergeland, then a teacher at the grammar school, descended from a peasant family of the western fjords; his mother, the lovely and lovable Alette Thaulow, united a Danish and a Scottish ancestry. Nikolai Wergeland, a distinguished author and savant, was one of the most active members of the National Assembly at Eidsvold in 1814. Three years later he was appointed vicar of Eidsvold. A worthy disciple of Rousseau, this rationalistic clergyman took a keen interest in the education of his children, and particularly in the development of the extraordinary faculties of his eldest son Henrik. Henrik throughout his life loved

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<sup>1</sup>Papers on H.W. have been written, *e.g.*, by H. Lassen, H. Schwanenflügel, O. Skavlan, V. Troye, H. Möller, Gerh. Gran, Halvdan Koht.—The following notes—the biographical facts in which are mainly drawn from the first- and last-named authors—are restricted by the selections which they are intended to link together and do not attempt to give more than the veriest glimpse of our poet.

and revered his father, in whom he found the most intelligent defender of his literary production, while his heart wholly and in more direct sympathy went out to his mother.

The hills and dells around Eidsvold, the historical place inspiring reverence for country and constitution, made a glorious playground for venturesome children. Henrik grew up a sound soul in a sound body, strong and hardy, a lover of outdoor life, and with a gleam in his eyes which was early noticed by his parents. Eleven years old he was sent to school at Kristiania. History was from the first his favourite subject, later on also botany. Soon he was making his first attempts as an author. At the age of thirteen there appeared in *Morgenbladet* a short romantic tale, *Blodstenen* (The Blood Stone), signed W——g; Wergeland in later years had, as he has himself related, the honour of seeing it entered in a reader with signature in full—Washington Irving!

During the following years of theological study Wergeland lived by turns at Eidsvold and in the town, and produced a growing alarm in home circles by his full participation in the wild student's life of the times, with revels, brawls, shuffles with the police, and mischief generally. Being the best of comrades and "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward," he became quite naturally the leader of the students' corporation, which then played a part in the life of the young capital.



The year 1827 marks an epoch in the history of Norwegian literature. Wergeland then met with Shakespeare, who, if he did not open his eyes, at least (through the medium of Foersom's Danish translation) loosened his tongue. "Nothing else satisfies me now," he declared, and the desire for expression of what had awakened in him made him, the "sky-breather," wish to lock himself up, Balzac-wise, in a black little attic, and live as in an inkhorn. Anyhow, during the next eighteen years (the second half of his life-time) there flowed from his pen plays, poems, articles, magazines for the people, works treating of the most varied departments of life, ever for the cause of Humanity, for the Kingdom of God as he saw it.

The direct influence of Shakespeare is especially noticeable in his first works, as in the farce *Ah!* (1827), Scene 2, where Queen Mab has literally been with him.

The Dream Genius speaks :

"A diamond is my imagination,  
Cut thousand-edged; my reason ever  
Peers thro' it as thro' a kaleidoscope—  
Or 'tis a Chinese game which in a thousand  
Fresh forms my reason puts—Hallo!  
I split asunder easily, arising  
A hissing rocket, coming down as ten.  
Same time I play upon a sleepy sexton:  
Who hears bell-ringing—and upon a grocer:  
Forthwith he bacon smells—a maid: she laughs,

Her pillow kissing—then I touch a king :  
He struts and feels majestic, seeing that  
With phosphorus I paint him, *rex, rex, rex!*”

In the more important play *Irreparable Tempus* (1828),<sup>1</sup> he is occasionally at the master's side, as where he (Scene 1) touches on the different attitudes toward *Life*:

“ . . . Now, some are lying still  
And sleeping all the time, rending the darkness  
Only with yawns—like to the sleeper saints—  
Till down the roof comes by itself, and they  
Must swallow half the final snore and come,  
Rubbing their stupid, blinking eyes, into  
The fresh air blowing just beyond the wall.  
They are the lazy ones. But others run  
About and madly scratch with tooth and claw  
The murky wall on every side, until  
It crumbles, creaks, and lets in the fierce sunshine  
That scorches them like withered grass: their force  
Was spent, instead of gradually growing.”

However, the drama was not the form of art best suited to Wergeland's genius. As the world grew on his opening sense, the great uniting lines overshadowed details. To him mankind, a living, changing being, and part of a larger one—clasping the earth-ball like the fingers of God's hand—is more actually Man than the individual is. He lived too intensely in the world of the ideal to become a careful delineator of character, and his men and women (angels and demons more

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<sup>1</sup>Both in Vol. IV.

often) are all poets linked to everyday reality in most incongruous attitudes. Wergeland is nothing if not lyrical and—at the outset at least—anything but critical. His greatest play is *Venetianerne* (The Venetians), 1841, a drama of friendship and love.

Friendship and love were the dominating factors in Wergeland's life. But to the objects of his passion it must often have been as though he gazed through *them* at something far beyond their ordinary familiar selves. A handful of very dear friends he had, but most of his comrades found him too violent and overbearing. On his death-bed Wergeland admitted that he never did succeed in mastering his vanity. Probably—as with Thoreau, though for different reasons—more loved him than liked him. Taking *his* arm was to be raised on it. There is a story of his rushing up to a new acquaintance and firing off the question, point-blank: "*Will you be my friend?*"—"Yes, thank you—at a distance." His genial openness and exuberant cordiality rather repelled than attracted his individualistic countrymen. The words of A. O. Vinje are typical: "That man ever used such big words; it has always seemed to me that there was more of noise and motion than of deeper emotion." Yes, Wergeland could afford it; he was in league with the *building* forces of life; Vinje was a much *croded* man. Rock and tundra must be shy of such luxuriant growth; as when Henrik Wergeland greets "Sylvan, a Botanist," with a song recalling the first time they met "on the border between life and death," a last streak of snow like a fleeting pallor on the meadow . . .

“ Of the blue ice a passing sheen,  
when to the first faint smile of green  
a lark poured down its song . . .”

Come the colt's-foot, the coy anemone, and the march-  
violet oping its heavens—till from the dark depths of  
the earth its fire sparks out in dandelion and ranunculus.

“ If on thy bosom cold, O Earth,  
such glory we may see,  
then, Sylvan, surely fairer birth  
from ours in blossom shall call forth  
the Spirit's ‘ Let there be! ’ ”<sup>1</sup>

The idea of friendship, “ the institution of the dear  
love of comrades,” is the sap of a very great part of  
Wergeland's poetry. One of his earliest poems (1827),  
for which the author had a certain predilection, is  
addressed:

“ TO PETER KREFTING, MY FRIEND WHO  
HAS DIED

Ah! how the stars do sparkle: my friend's  
spirit is now passing by,  
onward, to swell the  
crowd of the spirits.

Now did it glide 'twixt me and a star,  
as from the altar the blue  
incense before the  
high-lifted torches.

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<sup>1</sup>From *Til Sylvan* (1834). Vol. I, p. 139.

Death's couch (alas!) the altar, and lo!  
Phthisis the priestess, whose knife  
ever is blunt, yet  
sure and thirsty.

Ha! I will mock at Fate, who shall now  
nought find in me anymore,  
nothing to filch with  
greedy crook'd finger.

Fools can only curse Fate; as for me,  
Coward I call him: he flees,  
when neath the lyrical  
ivy I rustle—

leaves which his fingers grasping shall miss;  
they are the garb of my soul,  
inwoven in thy  
memory, Dead One!

Fearless and faithful futureward look—  
such is the glittering wand,  
that which determines  
Fate's every footstep.

Reek not dim vapour from my heart-string!  
Sooner a ray I will send,  
after the spirit  
send a ray sooner.

Now canst thou learn the lay of the worlds,  
now—like a butterfly on  
Heaven's full roses,  
star-clusters, clinging—

draw pure the honey given to man  
fouled in the ancient horn,  
wriggling with darksome  
hieroglyphics.

See'st thou thy friend, cheek resting on hand,  
neither in sorrow nor joy  
to an Æolian  
harp he is listening?

Was it thy spirit floating upon  
waves of the breath-fondled gold?  
Was it a wind which  
kissed my brow lightly?

Spheres are thy harp: to silvery strings,  
trembling, on Heaven's broad blue  
shield-rims extended,  
now canst thou listen!

Just when thy death became known to thy friend,  
stars shot from Heaven; they came  
hasting to hail the  
new-comer welcome.

as from the lake a white-bosomed flock  
starts toward the first breath of spring,  
rising with cries on  
wings wide outstretching.

Venus did send, forth-beaming, a sweet  
white-veiled Stella, a guide  
to the good beings'  
star to conduct thee.

Mars hurled a beam, a herald gold-helm'd  
bidding thy soul come and join  
high on his car the  
host of his heroes.

Charles' Wain—a dancing chorus of fair  
vestals advancing, and great  
genial Rhea  
Sylvia leading—

choose rather thou! See, far toward the Pole  
rolls around midnight its wheel;  
with lily finger  
points the high priestess.

Linger till I, a fluttering veil,  
or a faint luminous cloud,  
come along, drifting  
over the mountains!

Lo, we shall melt together to one  
conscious being—two rays  
gold-winged Aurora  
Boreal forming!

High-hearted wert thou, free was thy soul:  
white-toothed wave did it hurl  
hard 'gainst the rock of  
Tyranny, hollowed.

Warm for thy land, the rights of all men,  
thou every tyrant didst hate,  
whether a sceptre  
or a pen wielding.

Friend! a birth merely to thee was thy death:  
little the child knows the pangs  
felt by its mother—  
Life was thy mother.

Reek not dim vapour from my heart-string!  
Sooner a ray I will send  
after the spirit,  
out of tears beaming.

Song is its wing, and so it will not  
drown in the cloud-deeps without  
reaching at last thy  
hastening shadow! ”<sup>1</sup>

The years 1827-29 mark the most significant period in our poet's life, the time of the unfolding of his genius. Alongside of his theological studies he assimilated the ideas of the great writers of the eighteenth century, together with the early songs of liberty and dawning philosophy of evolution of the nineteenth. Byron for a long time gripped and overshadowed his soul like a bird of prey, which he shook off at last in a storm at sea.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. I, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Wergeland's relations to Byron (and Lamartine) are the subject of an interesting article by Prof. Chr. Collin in *Atlantis, Kria* of Jan. 1919.



Wergeland's greatest work was now forming within him, the world-poem to which his life was to be the commentary, and which he recast on his death-bed, in order that men should understand his message. Deep and dark was the gestation of this titanic work until it sprang forth armed and shining. In Wergeland's own metaphorical language, meteor-swarms of philosophic and historical matter, finding their common centre of gravitation, were hurled, one blazing comet, headlong towards the sun. The force welding together all these heterogenous materials was the youthful poet's passion for a maiden "fair and radiant," an unrequited passion. The desire to appear with all his being before the loved one, and the rejection of his love, so to speak, into the whole universe, brought forth the poem of *Creation, Man and the Messiah*.

*Skabelsen, Mennesket og Messias*, a work of 720 pages, was written off during the year 1829, the year in which he passed his examination in theology, and published in 1830. "A grand poetic overture to the July Revolution," says the discerning and sympathetic Danish critic, H. Schwanenflügel; and he adds, with regard to the revised edition, *Mennesket* (Man) of 1845:<sup>1</sup> "It is available for anyone who is not altogether unpoetical, and whose soul is not totally deaf to the supreme problems of life."<sup>2</sup>

In giving a few traits of this poem or prophecy, which for intensity of conception and loftiness of vision cannot be ranked below Dante and Milton, we shall employ

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. III, pp. 516.

<sup>2</sup>Henrik Wergeland, *En literärhistorisk skitse*, p. 278.

the second edition, *Man*, the one in which the dying poet wished his message to reach mankind.

The author retains, in a revised form, the foreword to *Creation*, with the following note:

"Although this dithyrambic represents the sixteen years younger poet, and not the reviser, and thus might seem not to belong here, it is still given, in the present form, because it holds the key to the genesis of the poem—the statement of the connection between the young poet's platonic love and the resolve to write down a work like the following, cut short by the sense of his being overwhelmed by his subject, by "the All invading him."

This may justify an attempt at rendering these uncouth lines:

#### "TO AN ILLUSTRIOUS POET"<sup>1</sup>

By Mjösen, the heart of my country loud-beating  
beneath  
the full breasts of Heidmark, where Helgey arises,  
blushing pride of the motherly bosom. . . .  
Where Skreya, midsummer-sun's hostel with golden-  
red open  
cloud-gate, where the storm's whinnying foal and the  
vapours'

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<sup>1</sup>Viz. *Henrik Steffens*, to whom (with other champions of truth and freedom) the poem was dedicated. The great lake *Mjösen*, with its fair island *Helgö* and the broad, fruitful districts of *Hedemärken*, stretches northwards from a few miles north of Eidsvold. *Mt. Skreia*, on the southwest shore of the lake is, so to speak, the mid-air starting point of Wergeland's poetry.

car rest thro' the night, at morning to foam over  
the waters. . . .

Where headlong into the waves the mount plunges,  
a birch rises up, with anxious rustle and dizzily bent  
at once springing back. . . .

*There* a boy with his harp is sitting . . . Hear, ten  
of its strings  
sound like the slow bells of sadness, like notes  
of the blackbird—  
ten like fire-spluttering Hell do shriek, thrice ten like a  
hymn-trembling temple resounding.

Fifty harp-strings? Nay, golden kingdoms of Stella!

But hush! Lonely they sigh like the valley  
no wanderer visits.

And over them all now sorrow is ruling,  
an old jaundiced monk.

Fifty harp-strings? Ay, golden kingdoms of Stella!

The throne is deserted, and they  
'neath an ocean of anarchy moaning.

Then, Stella, like free Tomyris,  
reign over howling desert!

Waste where no echo would answer  
even thy name, shouldst thou cry.

Alas! or live in thy oasis,  
lone like ~~Z~~enobia proud!

Thy eyes—lo! living sources!  
Thy lips--roses of Jericho! <sup>1</sup>

Thy cheek is a palm-grove  
in sunrise glowing!

Thy teeth—Palmyrean columns,  
built of alabaster!

But, woe! Legions are coming,  
days frosty are coming.

Thy bosom 'neath the yoke darkening,  
thy heart droops like a conquered banner.

The pillars of Tadmor are broken.  
Moths flutter by . . . Now stillness is reigning.

*Then*, where is *then* Stella? Lo, here is my harp  
with one broken string!

Not till in Heaven, tho' hardly a bow-shot from  
Skreya,  
a leap from my seat 'neath the trembling bent birch,  
shall I recover the broken one whole;  
Stella kneeling entwines it.

'It broke,' she will say; 'that time thou with anxious  
calling my feigned playful flight didst pursue.

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<sup>1</sup>The translator was sorely tempted to substitute *Sharon*.

We were running—rash play!—in a church-yard,  
we both stumbled into a grave.'

' Hush, loved one, hush! '—thus I interrupt her—  
' I found thee at last in thy flight :  
did I not seize thee 'mongst stars?  
Immortality is our dowry;  
beams our wedding-garment,  
thine white as the stars, mine silvery golden;  
on the heights of the blest stands our home;  
Messiah weds us for Eternity;  
the seraphs strike up; we dance thro' radiant Heaven.'

Now—Bard!—my sadness is joy, my joy becomes  
    song 'neath the birch-tree,  
Song, song between Heaven and Earth, up here  
    where a pair of  
eagles that nigh have hidden their nest, swift-rushing  
    do fan me,  
song, song of Heaven and Earth, song of the nature  
    of Souls.  
For see! Like the falcon to loftiest solitude rising—  
just when the ring-dove it missed, then soaring most  
    calmly,  
e'en tho' as nothing had happened—I seek consolation  
here in my castle of solitude 'gainst the maid's  
    hardness:  
here on my mount, on my dizzy ledge with the  
    birch-tree,  
here on my mound, my soft flowering hillock where  
    every  
sorrow at once is turned into heavenly visions.

There now is leaning my head while pondering deep  
the  
nature of Love, on how it can be that a woman—  
coy as the white water-lily so fair that floats 'neath  
the surface,  
altho' its corolla is ripe and full like the young  
maiden's bosom—  
power has my soul to govern, my strong will, alone,  
without limit,  
as if in each look a blue-glimmering steel net were  
thrown—  
power has the beat of my heart absolutely to measure :  
soon as the bell 'gainst the temple-wall, or as the  
billows  
break on the rocks; then again—by a casual smile—  
slow with inaudible beat, softly as butterfly-wings.

Ah! Three seconds peace, and my soul's at the  
borders of  
realms of thought and of dreaming.  
Spirits already accost me,  
some of them speaking, others just beckoning mild.

' Hush! '—one is whisp'ring—' Once in the days of  
creation a  
pair of seraphs did seek them  
homes in Adam's and Eve's  
slumbering hearts; from them you both do descend.

Alas! They could not recognise one another—but  
vaguely,  
secretly feel one another.

This feeling the love of  
man and of woman, mighty tho' groping and blind.

One spirit himself from Heaven did banish; the other  
self-sacrificing did follow.  
Self-sacrifice is heavenly  
Love's inmost law, spirit to spirit in Love.'

. . . How like 'tis the Love of the Saviour!  
O dear, tender, tender Mother!  
I will sing of Heaven's Love only,  
my own love, the earthly, forgetting.

What foolish prattle! This love is  
descended also from Heaven!  
Our heavenly names now I know,  
wherewith in our graves we are christened.

The spirit I have seen that lived in  
Adam's heart—me he resembled—  
and that which to Eve's heart its life gave . . .

O Stella!

I recognised thee in the blest one!

Like the spirit thou too once shalt wear  
a wreath of Heaven's starry blossoms,  
thy heritage costly; then shall I step forth  
from clouds where far off I was kneeling.  
With shining flowers from the garland then  
shalt thou strew my head full proudly,  
whose promise bold I redeem when I sing  
the Marriage of Heaven and Earth.

Oh! daring design! . . . I tremble.  
All Nature has heard it.  
Rustling the birch to the lake gave it,  
rushing the lake to the shore rolls it.  
Thund'ring the All breaks upon me:  
'See, Poet! Am I not Love, Love alone?  
Forget not the stars! Forget not the flower!  
Forget not the worm in the dust!'

And the stars, one by one, are approaching,  
like full, shining sails;  
beasts break out from the forest,  
hemming me in with kind looks;  
rises the snake in the heather,  
proud as a king who his kingdom is viewing;  
the flowers, their hearts to disclose, are  
opening all.  
All wants to be sung in the Love-poem,  
all there is being nothing but Love.

Anguish! anguish! I am o'erwhelmed  
by heavenly visions and greatness of worlds,  
by the motley whirl of the living.  
Myriad-voiced the All rushes on me,  
confuses with thick-crowding visions—  
that I, who should in the midst of its zenith  
sit like immovable eye, solitary,  
am whirl'd on myself, like a mote among motes.



Illustrious Poet! Would by my harp thou wert  
seated,  
thy hands to my brow sweet coolness returning :  
the laurels for which it is burning! ' ' ' <sup>1</sup>

In the opening scene *Phun-Abiriel*, a vigorous sceptical spirit, and *Ohebiel*, a loving spirit, hover over the steaming planet. They continue their intercourse from some other globe of matter, Ohebiel exhorting to "kneel and pray in God's fresh, reeking foot-prints," Abiriel refusing to worship what he cannot grasp with his understanding.

With a brush truly "dipt in the sun" the drama of creation is unfolded, till the acme of organic evolution is reached in the first semi-human pair. "In sleep 'neath the oak-tree the spirit with dust is united, residing to quiet within its blood-heated dwelling. Awake, he, the sceptre of consciousness seizing, shall cry out the password of spirits: *I am!*" But impatient Abiriel here breaks into the plan. Longing to hear once more the music of nerves and to rest in flesh, he buries himself in the body of the man, thrusting its slumbering spirit aside to dwell, as instinct, in the blood. Ohebiel is left aghast at this spirit-suicide, and, seeing the disaster which would issue from man's union with a lower being, descends into the body of the woman, thus to draw him upwards and on.

"One spirit himself from Heaven did banish;  
the other, self-sacrificing, did follow."

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. III, p. 1—6.

Dark is the road which mankind has to travel, dragging along property, stumbling into war, weltering in misery. It is with a sense of relief that we, after toiling through this part of the poem with its everlasting chain of conspiracies between tyrants and priests, see a first straggling ray of light, a messenger of the human spirit. A throng of men are waiting outside a prison door; a listener reports:

“No more the laugh of Socrates I hear . . .  
Xenophon weeping . . . Plato speaks no more.”

At length the life of the Saviour, rising against all adversity, realises the ideal of truth, love, and freedom, and regains Paradise—the recognition of God in Self—no more to be lost. The poem closes with an enthusiastic prophetic vision of the destiny of Man: Earth has become like Paradise, and Man glorious. Abiriel's glowing fire is blended in the race with the mild spirit of Ohebiel. However, in woman—in the depths of her heart, in the smile on her lips, in the blushing roses of her cheek, in the deep, clear well of her eye—dwells Ohebiel's spirit, heavenly pure, whilst the flames of Abiriel flash stronger from the heart of the man, even as the diamond's core of light.

The mighty spirit of Man now no longer feels its flesh and blood as a chain on its hands and a bolt at its foot. Like the feathers of birds merely, and a rose-leaf garb, does it feel the weight of its body.

The bright day of Truth, the voices of Duty, and the wing-beat of Liberty triumphant over treacherous

desire, fill the temple of his brow, while in his heart burns still and mild the heavenly fire of Brother-love, radiant from his outstretched hands.

Then every human being has a throne within his brain, and in his heart an altar and sacred vessels. Everyone is a king to the Earth and a priest to God.

Wergeland's work has the strength and the defects of spontaneity. His soul "expanding from Heaven to Hell" shatters the old forms. Emerging into the universal spring of creation he is beside himself with joy. Hence his style cannot be expected to satisfy the French critic's demand for *propriété*, *clarté*, *brèveté*, *netteté*, *ordre*. "If a man has anything to say," declares the author of *Walden*, "it drops from him simply and directly, as a stone falls to the ground." But that which comes from Wergeland's hand rises into the air and flies, nor is it always easily caught. He has his own way of thinking into winged forms, which in the case of his writings never leaves doubts about the authorship. We are overwhelmed by a bewildering avalanche of images—for he could think only in the concrete—page-long periods where syntax is on the rack. He himself humorously complains that:

"By parentheses unnumbered  
the reader is encumbered;  
but also for the author they are horns  
entangling him like Abram's ram in thorns.  
ever more hopelessly, in sorry trim,  
where he won't get his thought, but the critic will get  
him."

Wergeland embraces such a number of things with simultaneous interest. By means of the "yellow spot" in the background of the eye, we see one thing in one moment while the surrounding objects merge into vagueness. In Wergeland the whole background of the eye is golden, and when all that has been gathered there is to be rendered in the long succession of written words, the lines may often take on the shape of a maze—always, however, with something at the centre worth the search.

The faults and flaws, absence of taste and sense of proportion, which are so very evident in the earlier poems, are mainly due to the fact that he could only improvise—rush on and on without ever looking back. *Creation, Man and the Messiah*, which he had proposed to read to some lady acquaintances at the tea-table, grew in a few weeks to a length of more than 700 pages. His pen flies so fast that it sometimes seems to slip the paper, and we miss the trace altogether. There is truth in the picture of thought rising and sinking in its flight, while the word, its shadow, must follow along the ground—the loftier, the dimmer.

To contemporary critics Wergeland's exuberant imagery was impenetrable, and, headed by J. S. Welhaven, they declared Wergeland to be anything but a poet, and a madman more than anything else. Welhaven expressed fully his lack of comprehension, together with some sound æsthetic argument, in a review of *Wergeland's Poetics and Polemics* (1832), to which Nikolai Wergeland replied in the following year with *A Just Criticism of Henrik Wergeland's*

*Poetry and Character.* Wergeland and Welhaven represent two—as yet separate and warring—forces underlying human progress: the desire for *liberty* and the desire for *order*. They are the leading names in the intellectual history of Norway from 1830 to 1845. Welhaven considering pupilage under Denmark still necessary, Wergeland striving to call out all national forces and fructify them through direct contact with as wide a world as possible.

Poets only—so the Indian saying is—are moved by the words of poets; as the moonbeams raise the ocean, but not the water in wells. Wergeland from the first had only a small knot of understanding readers, with a wider ring of more doubtful applauders who felt that here was something unusual. He may well describe himself as the tongue of a bell which is wrapped in a thick, damp covering. But Henrik Wergeland had the same absolute faith as William Blake and Walt Whitman.

Very similar expressions of the universal unity occur in all these poets. To Emerson the underlying feeling and the faculty of being “caught up into the life of the universe” is the very source of poetic vision. Perhaps no one yet came nearer than Henrik Wergeland to Emerson’s ideal of a “poet-priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle with Shakespeare the player, nor shall grope in graves with Swedenborg the mourner; but who shall see, speak, and act with equal inspiration.”

To this spirit, religion and life are naturally one thing. Wergeland would not have religion put in any corner, whether of time or of space. Religion to him was as

wide as the world it moves. In that city of the future which, like William Blake, he was consciously building, Love was the gravitation causing the stones to cling together. To the sense which is awake to the actual living connection of every being, self-sacrifice is as much a matter of course as the flowing of water from a higher level to a lower. A new word in morals is here wanted: *egaltruism* might be suggested, as uniting the ancient opposites. "Are not Religion and Politics the same thing?" "Brotherhood is Religion," says William Blake.

The consciousness of his calling as a poet, and how he understood it, appears so often throughout Wergerland's work that we must remember that he was upholding his view of the poet's office against the prevailing one. He expresses himself at large in an article *On the Young Swedish Poet, Ridderstad* (January, 1834), in which he charges contemporary Danish literature with aiming exclusively at entertainment: it is a sophia literature. The ancient bards kindled their audience to doughty deeds. They did not lock their souls up in cabinets, but went to their work in the world. They lived in spheres which their times did not yet touch; their songs were prophecies. . . . We want poets who do not live in Heaven, thence to spit on Earth; men who are masters of their ideals, and who idealise in order to realise. . . . The true poet can only belong to one party, that of Heaven and of a bettered Earth.<sup>1</sup> For a short while he had followed Oehlenschläger and Tegnér with a couple of ballads and a vigorous picture,

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<sup>1</sup> *Om den unge svenske skjald Ridderstad*. Vol. V, pp. 184—194.

as if carved in bold relief on wood, of an old Norse viking's hall—*Et gammelnorsk herresæte*—which wrung applause even from Welhaven; but he soon returned to the “now” with a vengeance—as in the following lines:

### “TO A YOUNG POET

Bard! Look thou not behind thee,  
not toward the rune-covered stones,  
not toward the grave-mound, barbaric days hiding!  
Those shields, leave them lying! Let them moulder,  
those bones!

Archæologist ants, let them creep about on that  
mound;  
them a handful of dust will—like snuff an old woman—  
inspire to tell tales that incredible sound.

A greater hero see thou under the vault of thy breast:  
his heel treads a dragon, a serpent his belt is,  
and hard-hewing eagles his helmet do crest.

Towering, the hero treads the rank dragon into its  
grave.

His heart swells, and straightway the serpent is  
shattered,  
that around it did roll like a great rolling wave.

Th' eagles, gulls of the ether blue deep, he shakes  
them amain,  
like a storm-swayèd mast; then like mist from the  
mountain,  
from his brow they exhausted sink into the main.

In his strife he is speeding over a great open sea;  
dimly distant as stars other white sails surround him:  
there heroes with dragons are fighting as he.

Forwards over an e'er dawning blue the hissing bows  
glide.

Blood-stained the ankle; the forehead high-lifted, bright-  
shining—

not hawks, Heav'nly spirits upon it do ride.

Happy the hero shall rest in his ship, deep in a mound;  
but he lives there, yea lives, 'neath its roof decked with  
violets,

and his name aye in songs of the spirits does sound.

Bard! That mound shalt thou praise!

Dost thou not see its fair crest?

See'st not the glittering shield on its summit?

the tall, waving lilies that shine on its breast?

See'st not the hero fainting under the heavens, alone?  
nor the fierce, crownèd eagles that daring do seat them,  
where spirits have chosen their temple and throne?

Did not snake-chained Humanity up from the dust rise  
at last?—

Shake the serpents from off it, like th' aspen its dead  
leaves?—

A dull rattling crown was each link that it cast.

A VOICE:

Woe! The black snake is hanging yet at its foot like  
a bolt!



See it yawning wide in the Vatican portals—  
its crown as the dome does the heavens assault.

Woe! Cæsarian eagles are sitting yet on its brow!  
Thro' the eyes to the brain they are hacking; tears  
only  
in the empty eye-hollows are glistening now.

Woe! Long, uniformed ranks are winding, like  
serpents steel-grey,  
round Humanity's limbs their coils ever tighter;  
every heart that dare beat they would stifle and slay.

THE FIRST VOICE:

Bard! In heavens where Time has not entered with  
measured pace,  
the Seer with Victory dwells *ere* the battle,  
and together with Hope soars in front of the race.

Flies not his vision ahead of all time, ahead of the  
world?

The earth-ball behind rolls History's thunder—  
the song of the Seer's the lightning forth-hurl'd.

On the dome of an unopened heaven rest thy stringèd  
shield:  
soon it will become (like *these* heavens star-spangled)  
a dew-glitt'ring mound on a century's field." <sup>1</sup>

So Henrik Wergeland, with face lighting up his sur-  
roundings, went out over his own land, doing there  
*his* viking deeds, rooting up dead stumps of conven-

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. I, p. 80.

tion, sowing, planting new life (from trees to libraries), giving a hand to every undertaking which could help to raise his people, being like the great leader in battle—*everywhere*.

There never was a man with a larger portion of the divine faculty of *awakeness*.<sup>1</sup> But the awakener, according to history, is never a desirable person.

“Most people are good-natured nincompoops,

Hating no one but him that would awake them.”<sup>2</sup>

What a commotion this man was making! How he did stalk about, bringing his rough Norwegian manners, clothes, and language into the danicised capital. Orator and leader of processions on Constitution Day, the 17th of May, for a time editing an opposition paper of ill repute, and (in “the proudest moment of his life”<sup>3</sup>) witnessing from his box in the theatre the rout of his literary opponents in a regular battle at the performance of his play *The Campbells*. As in the colossal statues which their nation leaves them, the *feet* of these great men are so much in evidence—seen from a lower point of view. Journalists buzzed and lawyers stung, while offended authorities tried to pin him down with actions for libel. “It is hard luck for Henrik Wergeland,” rails a contemporary scribbler, “to have to fight a swarm of pygmies that are unable to grasp his real greatness. Posterity no doubt will——”

Yes! The true proportions *will* sometimes come out with the distance.

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<sup>1</sup>If this word may be used to suggest that it is for the gods to be awake, and godlike to have as much of this faculty as possible.

<sup>2</sup>*Mennesket*, Vol. III, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup>*Hasselnødder*, Vol. VI, p. 419.

Wergeland would occasionally let what he called his satirical "twin-brother," *Siful Sifadda*, enter the lists for him—in his *farces*—"and *he* always deported himself bravely."<sup>1</sup> But he has other allies as well. He opens his window and lets in the first butterfly, that it may warm itself in the bosom of his rose. More proud himself than the cold world without, he has need of the love of these little ones.<sup>2</sup> At the time when he was toiling with studies for his theology examination he might fling the book into a corner, snatch up his little lame rabbit, and, gazing into its dim eye, would see the creation of worlds in vista deep and far.<sup>3</sup> His room at Eidsvold rectory, and later on in his own house, *Grotten* ("The Grotto"), in the outskirts of Christiania, was like a natural history museum with a zoological garden in addition. He kept a dog, a cat, and a fox together, and made them friends! The reptiles, however, were given notice—as his wife tells us—when *she* moved in. There really never was any serpent in Wergeland's Eden! He was never driven *out*, but seems to have remained in that garden of the world's youth as Pan in Paradise. His good horse *Veslebrunen* (Brownie) was a faithful companion, who carried him on his back on his summer excursions, and in winter in a boat-like sleigh of Wergeland's own construction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. VI., p. 443.

<sup>2</sup>*Den förste sommerfugl* (1837), Vol. I, pp. 194—197.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Edward Carpenter: *Towards Democracy*, p. 175: "Come nigh little bird with your half-stretched quivering wings—within you I behold choirs of Angels, and the Lord himself in vista."

<sup>4</sup>With ensign flying aft and small brass guns on either side, for saluting. Traits of "Wergeland at home" are given in his friend R. G. Latham's book *Norway and the Norwegians*, London, 1840.

*Everything* to him was alive and lovable. He was in love with the open air, and its vitality pervades his work; these are the living leaves as of a tree, a *foot-drinker* according to the vigorous Sanskrit term, grasping the earth close; *these* also, raised high in the sunlight, are in-gatherers of cosmical energy. He converts the sunbeams into joy, and commits his cares to the broad leaves of his ivy.

His resentment evaporates—

#### IN THE OPEN AIR.

Fly, Spring-time fair, so light and gay,  
Fly not with all my spite away!  
I fain my anger would have given  
One gloomy hour, by hail-storms riven.

In stormy bursts of hail and snow,  
which would the blossoming fruit-trees throw,  
that hour must plunge its glowing ember,  
wherein my wrath I should remember.

Now deep in the soft grass it lies,  
sweeter than Love's near touch it dies.  
As in warm jets of heart-blood living,  
my anger dies away forgiving.

If, once awakening, my scorn  
would start a chase and blow the horn,  
I'd have to stop for laughter soon  
at singing gnats, frogs out of tune.

When the sun shines my grudge is gone,  
Such ugly word was never known  
to sound from waves upon the beach—  
Sweet choir, how gently dost thou teach!

How fair and kindly greetings pass—  
that men might see!—from grass to grass.  
A withering straw, he fades away—  
why miss the gladness of the May?

Itself a coloured ray, a snake,  
basks in the sun; I will not shake  
it from my ankle—thou, poor wight,  
art innocent! Live and delight!

Of poison, in this blissful minute,  
the snake's fang has no least drop in it.  
Why should I mind the least those others,  
that crawl about on my book-covers?

Come to the wedding of the thrush!  
Wildly but well from his twig (hush!)  
he sings, your criticisms and (shocking!)  
your codes of art heartily mocking.

Oh, spring-time's sweet and fragrant air!  
Believe that sylphs are breathing there;  
but blend not with its breath the dank,  
the mouldy sigh—'twere poison rank!

And thou, bird-cherry tree, dost bend,  
o'er my low hut, a sheltering friend.  
Thy shade thou ne'er to anger yield!  
There may no festering sorrow build!

Next spring thou shalt, far as I know,  
scatter my grave all with thy snow;  
or, will its flowerets drop inside  
the cup I kiss, who have no bride?

Merrily shake them to the ground,  
altho' they fall on my grave-mound!  
May Beauty's soulful lover there  
make him his seat in th' open air!

Maligner, seat you there, and more  
love Nature than you did before!  
The secret then you might acquire,  
what sound-board she did give my lyre! ''<sup>1</sup>

Outwardly, Henrik Wergeland's life did not seem successful. For years he was continually applying for an appointment as a clergyman, though, considering his attitude towards the tenets of the established church, it may be more of a mystery that he should have applied than that he should not have succeeded. In 1834 he began studying medicine in order to gain his living as a doctor, but discontinued his studies in 1836, when he obtained an assistant librarianship at the University of Christiania. A pension from King Carl Johan in 1839 enabled him to marry the young girl of his choice (Amalie Bekkevold), a child of the people, whose motherly care for her little sisters and brothers had touched him deeply. The story of his looking for a house to buy with part of the sum received for *The*

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<sup>1</sup>*I det grønne*, Vol. 1, p. 207.

Welhaven declares that no noble nature could play while the surroundings shiver with discords. As it was, Wergeland's tone conquered the discords; he played environment into harmony with himself.

*Campbells*, of his leaving his good horse *Veslebrunen* to pick his way through the suburbs; how Brownie stopped at the prostrate figure of a man sleeping on the road, and how the man's cottage was straightway purchased, how the idyllic abode on the fjord necessitated the keeping of a boat and the daily depositing of oars, etc., at a boatman's house on the town side, and the boatman having a daughter. . . . All this is simply and charmingly told in the autobiographic sketches—*Hassel-Nödder*.<sup>1</sup>

The gratuity from the King had only been accepted on the express condition that the poet should publish a paper and various works for the enlightenment of the people. But friends and foes were now agreed that Wergeland had become a court-pensioner and a traitor. What was hardest to him was that they tried to rob him of the people's faith. But he looked thro' them. Even when, mortally ill, his means having gone to pay for endless law-suits, he was turned out of his grotto—even then his faith did not forsake him, and in his lines, *The Grotto at Auction*, he alludes to his persecutor in the following words:

“ It may be superstition, or  
again it may not be:  
the thought is near  
and very clear,  
that tho' my evil spirit *herc*  
an ugly black chrysalis wore,  
a winged elf was he.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. VI., pp. 321—328.

<sup>2</sup>From *Auktion over Grotten*, Vol. I, pp. 446—449.

The fate of such men calls forth superfluous commiseration from those who see the opposing mountains of difficulties, but do not feel the joy of rising above them. There is a poetic sense which in the life of action, as well as in that of imagination, accepts a law that is its liberty:

“ No other rest is the spirit allowed  
than the soaring eagle’s, piercing the cloud  
on strong extended pinion.”

In 1840 Wergeland was appointed keeper of the public records, and many respectable people heaved a sigh of relief to see the demagogue in the arms of the state—safe at last! Having access to the state archives, he now wrote his standard work on the *History of the Norwegian Constitution*,<sup>1</sup> which has recently been republished. In the following years he issues a number of larger poems, which by their perfect artistic expressions have become recognised classics. It is doubtful whether the year 1840, at the celebration of the Printing Press jubilee, heard a grander cantata than Wergeland’s *Vord Lys!* (Let there be light!) It opens with a description of physical light dawning on the earth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Norges Konstitutions Historie* (1841—43). Recently republished with an introduction by Prof. J. E. Sars. The work is nowise “forgotten” as stated in the article on H.W. in Vol. XXVIII of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edition, and in the *New International Encyclopædia* (New York, 1904). Both articles totally underrate the importance of Wergeland’s works. The position of Henrik Wergeland himself in the history of his country is seen in Professor Sars’ great work on the political history of Norway in the 19th century.

<sup>2</sup>“ the insect’s pliant feelers then  
th’ awakening concept waved.”



Clothing matter and motion with *life* it raises the lofty figure of human genius as on a pediment of rays, rounding it with a mystical song of the soul, of that light-blood which flows through spirits, and which the grave's maw can never drain.

From this maturer period of Wergeland's life are some of his most popular poems like *The English Pilot*, 1844. The latter, sprung from impressions gathered on his visit to England in the summer of 1831, contains vivid descriptions of English scenery, testifying to the poet's swift and sure grasp of the typical in landscape.<sup>1</sup> Norwegian nature he rendered in its essentials: the sombre fir, the waterfall, in whose voice he hears the name of "*Norge!*", the meeting of rugged peak and glacier with the fair, green valley. The graceful, undulating plains, south of the seas, spring and autumn have moulded, hand in hand; summer and winter have forged out old Norway between them. Welhaven, who could draw on the wealth of Norse folk-lore, unearthed towards the middle of the century, and a gradually extended knowledge of the country and the people, advanced further in the production of the specific Norwegian colour, leading on to Björnson's "*Norge, Norge!* looming out of the grey-green sea."

We need not follow Henrik Wergeland about all through his tumultuous working-day in order to find out at last *where he lives*. He who is the truest son of his *Mother Earth* is also bound with the strongest ties to his

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<sup>1</sup>In "*The English Pilot*" is the *Greeting to England*, which, in Mr. William Archer's translation, was read at the banquet for Norwegian seamen in London, on the 12th of April, 1917.

*Mother Country.* Perhaps he comes nearest in his lovely *child-poems*. What Norwegian has not once felt *our* sun and *our* summer there? At his touch the meadow spreads out green and yellow, and we are running bare-foot in the grass once more. And we stand in the Christmas dawn side by side with the wondering child, gazing at the beautiful flowers that grow all over the window, and feel the breath of life which called this glorious winter-bloom into being.

It seems that Wergeland, like some great force and natural phenomenon of the skies, would mostly hurtle and shatter the proud and lofty, raising to him that which seeks the lowest places. It may be quite natural that gentle lines of his, like the following,<sup>1</sup> have comparatively the widest appeal.

“Lowly are all thy ways and plain!  
This gives the proud and purblind pain;  
their life is hidden from them.  
Traceless its days do disappear;  
like Jordan to the silent mere,  
they toward the grave are flowing,  
nor deed or honour knowing.

But came to Jordan's silent shore  
the World's Redeemer not of yore?  
To Nile or Euphrat never:  
Well then! Let Jesus betake him  
to thy life-river's shaded brim,  
how well tho' softly gliding,  
his image there abiding.

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<sup>1</sup>*Kun dagligdags er al din Dødt* (1836), Vol. I, p. 145.

Each morning call him! Without fame  
day dawneth not in such a name :  
therein begin thy labour.  
'Twill have, tho' without pomp it be  
greatness enough for Him who'll see  
of things their core and meaning,  
not how they may be gleaming."

The idea uniting the varied activity of this showerer of actions was that of *help*. The poor and miserable, wrote his father, were the surest to gain his heart. He needed, as Professor Collin says, the help of someone whom he might help. Thus did the thought of those who were persecuted and outlawed help him to produce those flowering rose-tree branches, as his poems are called, *Jöden* (The Jew) in 1842, and *Jödiinden* (The Jewess) in 1844.<sup>1</sup> The attitude of his countrymen to the foreigners is given in a humorous conversation between the maple and the fir. The former has allowed a merry swarm of bees to settle in its top, and gets honey and sweet music in return.

" Each twig is full of bustle gay;  
a cup now every leaf  
reaches to lips of honest toil,  
where crept a hairy thief."

But the fir is not going to give up its principles:

" My turpentine upon the rock  
flows down like melted ore;  
thus it has done a hundred years,  
and shall a hundred more."

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<sup>1</sup> The Jews were admitted to the Kingdom in 1851, six years after Wergeland's death. In 1849 a memorial was raised on the poet's grave by "grateful Jews beyond the confines of Norway."

Almost losing patience at times in his struggle for the cause of liberty, he could express the wish that, Truth herself descending on earth: "not with words her wings be plumed, but with swords!" *The Jew* contains, among some of Wergeland's sublimest poetry, a clear, dramatically rounded, pathetic tale, which may be given here, as being of the best known and appreciated in his own country.

#### "CHRISTMAS EVE

Who cannot call to mind a storm, a tempest  
so fierce he thinks that Heaven no worse can send?  
A tumult as the every soul, from Cain's  
to the last one God doomed, escaped from Hell,  
all cursed the Earth which made them give up  
Heaven? . . .

A storm whose voice can never be forgot.  
All thought: it must be sent because of *me*;  
at me the thund'ring hurricane is aimed;  
my sin has become known unto the spirits. . . .  
A storm whose might can teach both priest and flock  
to worship demons in that element  
whose crash the old man e'er from childhood hears . . .  
a cloud-quake, a last judgment in the airs? . . .  
A storm which shook the stout heart in its stronghold,  
when thro' the uproar his own name was called  
by spirits carried past him on the wind,  
whilst every tree-top like a raven screamed.

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<sup>1</sup>*Sandhedens armee* (The Army of Truth), introduction to *Jöden*,  
Vol. II, pp. 301, 302.

But in the rocks the raven hid; the wolf  
his hunger tamed; the fox ventured not forth.  
Indoors no lights were lit, the dog let in . . .  
In such a storm thou gettest prayers, God!

In such a storm—it was the Eve of Christmas—  
when the tall night o'erstrode the cowering day—  
thro' Sweden's wilderness, the Tived forest,  
an old Jew heavily was plodding onward—  
awaited in the villages on this side  
from those beyond the forest, now for Christmas,  
by maids full many longingly. His knapsack  
held brooches, ribbons, and what else was wanted  
for coming days of Christmas and of New Year.  
Their longing knew suspense, but never fear;  
for never had Old Jacob disappointed  
them any Christmas yet: he came as sure  
as Christmas Eve itself.

In such a night . . .

' Hush! Was't again the tempest  
howling thro' branches? Was it not a cry? . . .  
Ah, there again! ' Straightway Old Jacob stops,  
and with strained sense listens a second time.  
'Tis heard no more. For now the storm increases,  
Thund'ring like cataract on him who's drowning.  
He presses on. ' Hush! There again a sound! '  
a sound that rose above the forests roaring.  
' The false owl cries just like a little child.  
Who in such weather would allow their child  
to roam? The she-wolf wouldn't let her whelps! '  
Again the old man weary totters onward.  
Again it cries, and he can doubt no more:

this whirlwind which already over yonder  
a winding snow-tow'r o'er the forest flings,  
has born a *word*, one single word, along.  
At once he turns to whence he heard it come,  
working his way deeper into the forest,  
deeper into the snow, into the night,  
rearing like mountain-wall against his steps,  
by instant-passing snow-gusts bleakly lighted,  
as if the whole white forest were one horde  
of flying, whirling, veiled ghosts and spirits,  
who howling rose each moment on his way;  
on airy toe they spun, horribly growing—  
and then were gone between the rooted trees.

Still the old man fights on against the tempest,  
advancing when it waxes; when it wanes—  
drawing its breath—he listens on his knees.  
Anon he rises, penetrates the darkness,  
as delving dwarf works thro' the pitchy mould.  
    . . . No more he hears . . . no more. The old Jew  
    trembles,  
thinking that evil spirits him do fool,  
and mumbles forth the prayers that he knows.  
Then 't whines again, surely this time quite near.  
His own call 'gainst the storm is carried back  
into his mouth. But there! look there! Ah, there,  
ten paces more! There something dark is moving  
upon the snow, as if the storm were jostling  
a stump, a little loosened at the root.

' An arm, an arm! Jehovah! 'tis a child,  
a child; a child—but *dead!* '  
Ah! Did the stars of heaven on this dark night,

when 'mongst them shone the Star of Bethlehem,  
think that no good on earth could e'er be done?  
None of them saw this instant how Old Jacob,  
as glad as tho' he had a treasure found,  
threw down at once his riches all, the knapsack;  
pulled off his narrow coat, carefully wrapped it  
about the lost child's limbs; then bared his breast  
and laid its cold, cold cheek up to it close,  
until it woke up from his own heart-beat.  
Then up he sprang. But whither now? The storm  
has covered up his track. What did he care!  
For in the thund'ring of the forest tree-tops  
he heard the harps of David jubilant.  
The stormy gusts seemed to him lofty cherubs,  
who, borne on snow-white wings, pointed the path;  
and on his random, winding way he felt  
the gentle strong pull of the Lord's own hand.

But how to find a house in the wild Tived  
in such a night, when lights durst not be burnt?  
Half-way across there was a lonely cottage,  
whose low roof could not be distinguished from  
the snow, nor its black wall from the bare rock.  
As by a miracle he was stopped by it.  
There, utterly exhausted, sank he down;  
and many a snow-spray flew ere he was able  
to trail him with his burden to the door.  
He gave a gentle knock—the child was sleeping.  
Then he discovered he had lost his knapsack,  
as he had nothing now at all to offer  
the good poor people who would run to open  
their door with hospitable haste. Alas,

full many a time he knocked, ere came the answer :  
 ' In our Lord's name who's there on such a night ? '  
 ' It is Old Jacob. Don't you recognise me ?  
 The old Jew ? '  
 ' *Jew!* ' thereat cried terror-stricken  
 together a man's and a woman's voice.  
 ' Then keep outside ! We have nothing to pay with.  
 Misfortune shouldst thou bring into our house,  
 this night when *He* was born thou slewest ! '  
 ' I ? '  
 ' Yea, thy people—and that is the sin  
 thro' thousand generations to be punished.'  
 ' Alas ! To-night the dog is let in ! '  
 ' Yes,  
 the dog, but no Jew in a Christian house.'  
 He heard no more. The cruel, cruel words  
 cut thro' him keener than the winter wind,  
 and, stronger than the wind, they threw him down,  
 down in the snow, bent o'er the slumbering child.  
 Then, as toward the window he did turn  
 his gaze—expecting that the white face might  
 appear again—it seemed as tho' in down  
 he sank, and that delicious warmth flowed thro'  
 his veins, and that known beings, gently whisp'ring,  
 like to the summer wind in grassy harp,  
 flitted about his couch, till one of them  
 said with raised, warning finger : ' Come ! He sleeps ! '  
 And in a bright-illuminated hall beside  
 they disappeared ; only the child remained,  
 drawing the pillows ever closer round him,  
 until it seemed to him he fell asleep.  
 The snow was softly burying the dead.



‘ O Jesus! There the Jew is sitting still! ’  
the man cried, as he looked out in the morning.  
‘ Well, chase him then! Why, it is Christmas Day! ’  
chimed in his wife. ‘ Look at the greedy Jew,  
how hard he draws his bundle to his breast! ’  
‘ Importunate as ever with his ware,  
staring in at the window with fixed look,  
as if *we* had the money for to buy.’  
‘ I shouldn’t mind seeing what he has got tho’. . . .’  
‘ All right, Jew, let us see! ’

The pair stepped out.  
They saw the frozen gleam in the dead eyes.  
More pale grew they than he, they cried in fear  
and trembled with remorse.  
‘ O Lord! O Lord!  
What a misfortune this! ’  
They raised him up;  
the bundle followed; loosened next his coat.  
There hung, with arms locked round the old Jew’s  
neck,  
Margretha, their own child, a corpse like him.  
So swiftly strikes no lightning, darts no adder,  
as pain and horror hit the couple home.  
The snow was not so pale as was the father;  
the storm did not wail louder than the mother.  
‘ Oh, God has punished us! The storm has not,  
but our own cruelty has killed our child!  
In vain, alas!—as on our door he knocked—  
we at the door of Mercy too shall knock  
in vain.’

When thro’ the forest road again was broken,

a man came from the farm where Gretha lived  
(the little girl was quartered on a farmer's)  
and whence she, as the Christmas bells were sounding,  
ere the storm came had wandered by herself  
to see her parents dear on Christmas Eve.  
He did not come to ask about the child,  
but for the Jew, from all the village girls  
whose hopes to go to church were now relayed  
to New Year's Day—that is, if he were found.

There lay he, stretched a corpse before the fire.  
His host, with gaze as frozen as the Jew's,  
his body bent and crooked like the corpse,  
sat staring stiffly into the red embers,  
and ever stirring, nourishing the fire,  
to get it straightened out, and the hands folded.  
In front of them Margretha's mother knelt,  
folding the stiff arms of her little one  
tighter and tighter round the dead man's neck.  
'She does no more belong to us,' she sobbed,  
'for he has bought our child by his own death.  
We dare not now take little Gretha from him;  
for she must beg for us of our Lord Jesus  
His intercession; to His father  
the poor Jew will complain . . .'<sup>1</sup>

*General misunderstanding* of his character and motives produced some of the sharpest thorns on Wergeland's path; the suspicion gathering round his relation to the somewhat arbitrary and not altogether popular sovereign of the united kingdoms, *Carl Johan*,

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<sup>1</sup>*Juleaftenen*, Vol. II, pp. 312—317.

may have hurt him most. When early in 1844 the King lay dying, Wergeland wrote his passionate lyric *The King is Suffering*,<sup>1</sup> wishing ardently—and he meant it—that he might heal the sufferer with his own life-blood. His strength should flow into the veins of the exhausted man, and then:

“ When the King opened his eyes,  
soared an eagle to the skies,  
Death’s eluded token.  
At his bed’s foot loud did ring  
the clangor of a broken string,  
at highest quiv’ring broken.”

“ *At highest quivering broken!* ” The words were shortly to come true. In the early spring of 1844 Wergeland caught a violent cold in his “ dungeon,” deep under Akershus Castle. He went on for a time conducting from his bed the business of his office (the State archives), and worked, *worked* with increasing intensity. There were so many things to be finished before leaving, and above all there was the revising of *Creation, Man, and the Messiah*, which he handled severely, greatly improving the artistic expression without anywhere altering the spirit, thus leaving in his corner of this earth one of its loftiest visions of the world through the medium of human consciousness.

Only an absolute faith in the *All-being* and in the perfectibility of man can explain the energy displayed by this dying man, in continued work for the common weal (as in his youth, with *Creation*, again two printing

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. I, p. 434.

presses could hardly keep up with his production), if possible, greater than ever before in his intensely vigorous life. Of himself he did not think till he could say that his self—not the true “I”—was almost gone. “A remnant burnt out in a severe fire is left; and its worth is soon to be decided.”<sup>1</sup>

True to his vow to be the knight of “snake-chained Humanity,” even Wergeland could not but feel more and more the overwhelming weight of his task. He is like the little boy who has gone out in the early morning *to destroy his father’s enemies*, the crowds of *thistles* rolling in waves of flame over the fields.<sup>2</sup> He will gather before night all the white thistle down for his grandmother’s pillow. He mows and toils, heedless of the sun’s rays. The thorns are red with his blood, and at every step he might plant his foot on the swollen coils of a snake in the dense growth. Onward! Onward!

Already the midday sun has passed high over the woods. Slowly the shadow is growing behind him—like the poltroon’s courage, when he feels himself unnoticed—and still the waves are rolling in upon his little clearing, which is sucked like a whirl into the ocean. The wind after noon has raised fresh thousands, emerging like slaves, bold with their numbers. His arms sink down; the wind carries away most of his harvest and sends a flying spray of thistle-down into his face.

Even so bootless is the labour of Love to conquer suffering, which is abundant as the *vices* (the bleaching

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<sup>1</sup> *Hasselnödder*, Vol. VI, pp. 438.

<sup>2</sup> *Tistelskjæg-plukkeren in Jöden*, Vol. II, pp. 327—329.

of whose countless flaming thistle-heads it is), so that the field of Humanity is deluged by these flowering and fading millions. What is the use of our toil? Were it not best to leave to Death the work of clearing?

•  
Ah! but will not grandmother's love fill up the boy's ever-hungering bag, in which the down was to be gathered? Its riches have melted to the size of a snow-ball, but she will take the weeping boy to her heart and the downs under her head and declare that they have breathed heavenly sleep about her limbs.

Fight on, therefore, with good courage! God does not count more than the will. Your cheek aglow in the struggle for the good cause shall draw angels to your side, who kneeling collect the drops from your brow to become stars in the Heaven where your spirit shall live, whence the lowering banks of your days shall appear as distant vine-hills, swathed in sunshine.

His countrymen were somehow being drawn towards their dying bard, and former friends who had for years kept aloof or attacked him, now came to be reconciled again. The interest now shown would sometimes become distasteful to him, as when he scribbled on the label of a medicine-bottle :

“ Now that I've scarcely a pint left of blood,  
now I am beautiful, now I am good.  
Now that I'm fainting,  
busts they are making and portraits they're painting.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. VI., p. 440.

The hardest time for him was when, in the spring, 1845, he had to spend ten days at the hospital after leaving "The Grotto," and before he could be removed to his new cottage *Hjerterum* ("Heart-room"). But here, through the tall, bare window of his ward, the moon brought in her silver basket those lovely white roses, the *Nights in the Hospital*.<sup>1</sup>

During the last months of his life Wergeland wrote his fresh, frank autobiographical sketches, *Hazel Nuts*, with plenty of good humour in them, mostly of past days at home and abroad, with an occasional glimpse of present events or shadows of the coming. Well-meaning friends have sent him prayer-books, and remind him of Death who has stood outside waiting so long. He opens the door a moment, pulls the Reaper himself in, and introduces him to the living.

#### "THE PERSONAL BEAUTY OF DEATH"<sup>2</sup>

My increasing indisposition had become known to that friend of mine, who could laugh on one side of his face, while the darkest gloom reigned on the other, and who now came to have the notes of hope changed into the gold of certainty.

'Thou foul and evil Death!' he cried hotly, 'Do not come here and play the Country and Literature a nasty trick!'

'Hush! Be quiet!' I whispered. 'He is near.'

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<sup>1</sup>Vol. I. p. 472-475.

<sup>2</sup>*Hasselnödder*, Vol. VI, p. 357-358.

I was not then strong enough to joke with him, though I should soon have turned the Janus face, but on a piece of paper I wrote :

*He* deserves to be run thro' by the long blue rapier of a deadly draught,  
who says that Death is ugly and evil.

*Evil?* For one year I have now been living by his mercy,  
turned away by Life, because I would suck *her* too long and made her breasts bleed with my greediness.

*Ugly?* My God! Where is there a slimmer and more well-knit gentleman?  
A mantle and a plumed hat, and he will out-do all the conquests of Don Juan.  
Even the worms of Death are not so ugly as those that just now crept over me: the false friend's fingers.  
His figure has the beauty of regularity,  
his face that of openness, and what can be more pleasing?

He may, however, be finer behind than in front;  
but how many men are not?  
A Janus face at least he has not got.

But you who have—what if even the bones  
in your face are twisted, when you have  
no flesh-mask to draw over them?  
Then who finds your skeleton *might* call Death ugly."

Still, Henrik Wergeland could not but yearn for life, more of the sweet earth-life which he had drunk in so eagerly. One May morning there appeared in *Morgenbladet* two poems<sup>1</sup> from his hand. One is addressed :

### “ TO SPRING

O Spring! Spring! Save me!  
No one has loved thee more dearly than I.

Thy first grass to me is worth more than emeralds.  
I call thy anemones the pride of the year,  
altho' I know that the *roses* are coming.

Often did they, fiery, stretch out after me.  
It was like being loved by princesses,  
But I fled: Anemone, Spring's daughter had my troth.

Oh witness, Anemone, before whom I have fervently  
knelt.

Witness, contemned Dandelion<sup>2</sup> and Colt's-foot,  
that I have valued you more than gold, because you  
are  
Spring's children.

Witness, Swallow! that I made ready for thee  
as for a long-lost child home again returned, because  
thou wert the messenger of Spring!

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<sup>1</sup> *Til Foraaret* and *Til min Gyldenlak*, Vol. I, p. 476—477.

<sup>2</sup> “The flower that grows the more it's trodden” was Wergeland's chosen emblem.



Seek the Lord of these clouds and pray  
that they may no longer throw darts into my breast  
from out of their cold, blue openings.

Witness, Old Tree! whom I have worshipped like a god,  
and whose buds I have counted every spring more  
eagerly than pearls.

Witness, thou whom I have so often embraced,  
with the reverence of a great-grandson for his great-  
grandfather.  
Yea, how often have I not wished to be a young maple  
of thy deathless root,  
and to blend my crown with thine!

Be my witness, Ancient One! Thou wilt be believed;  
for thou art venerable as a patriarch.

Pray for me, and I will pour wine on thy roots  
and heal thy scars with kisses.

Now thou art robed in thy fairest light green;  
thy leaves are rustling already.

O Spring! The old one is crying out for me, altho' he  
is hoarse.  
He stretches his arms towards Heaven,  
and the anemones, thy blue-eyed children, kneel and  
pray  
that thou wilt save me—me who love thee so dearly."

“TO MY WALLFLOWER”<sup>1</sup>

Wallflower mine, ere thy bright hues fade,  
I shall be that whereof all is made;  
ere thou hast shattered thy crown of gold,  
I shall be mould.

When ‘Open the window!’ I call, from my bed,  
my last look is for thy golden head;  
my soul will kiss it, as over thee  
it flieth free.

Twice do I kiss thy lips so sweet,  
Thine is the first, as it is meet;  
the second, dearest, remember close  
on my fair rose!

In bloom no more I shall it see;  
so give it my greeting, when that shall be,  
and say I wished on my grave should all  
its petals fall.

Yes, say I wish that upon my breast  
the rose thou givest my kiss shall rest;  
and, Wallflower, be in Death’s dark porch  
its bridal torch! ”

Henrik Wergeland was now starting on his last voyage, and—as he sung in the last of his sea songs, *Siste Reis*—never had he started more cheerfully on any adventure. He heard his mother calling him. Heavenly peace breathes in these lines from the threshold:

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<sup>1</sup>There are several translations of these beautiful lines, e.g. by Edm. Gosse, *Northern Studies*, and by Miles M. Dawson, *The American Scandinavian Review*, Oct. 1916. In this Review, June, 1918, appeared the lines “Lowly are all thy ways.” See p. 44.

## “THE BEAUTIFUL FAMILY

Wonderful! Ah, more than wonderful!

Miracle! Oh, miracle!

Oh, that my knees could bend in adoration!

My soul has folded up its wings,  
kneeling as in a veiled chapel;  
for my eyes have closed over the glory of the vision  
that I have beheld.

‘Do look!’ I said to my wife, ‘maybe I wrong the  
rose-tree.

One bud may have opened last night.’

‘One fully blown!’ she cried, clasping her hands,  
‘and six half-blown around.’

‘What a beautiful family!’ I said.

‘The full-blown one is like a mother amongst her  
daughters.’

Miracle! Heavenly miracle!

In the largest rose was seated a matron, no bigger than  
a humble-bee,

and clothed like the bee in golden bodice and black skirt,  
spinning thin gossamer threads from off a pistil.

‘Hush!’ she cried. ‘Open with a kiss the six  
half-blown roses, and you shall see my six eldest  
daughters.

We are genii, angels’ hand-maids.

We are all in your mother’s service.

She has sent us to prepare the clothnig

Wherein your soul shall pass away from here.’

I opened, as I was told, one rose after the other.  
In each of them there sat a genius, more richly clad  
than the gold scarab.  
All were working like their mother.

Their faces appeared known to me,  
They seemed to belong to loved ones gone before.

‘ See what a glorious rose-tinged tunic you shall have ! ’  
said the first.

‘ Don’t be afraid of its being too small,’ said the second.  
‘ As soon as it comes into the open air it will widen.’

‘ I am washing your scarf,’ said the third,  
washing some filmy golden threads in a dew-drop.

‘ And I ! and I ! ’ said the others as I came to them in  
turn,  
‘ Look ! Look ! ’

And one was preparing some attar of roses  
to anoint the delicate feathers which they  
said the soul already wore.

One was busy making a pair of sandals, which  
looked like a couple of tiny curled leaves  
from the interior of the rose.

‘ With them you can tread the glowing floor of the  
sun,’ she said,  
and sewed on, with an awl no bigger than the sting of a  
gnat.

The sixth sat idle with her hands resting in her lap.  
'I have done,' she said. 'Mother has already got my  
work, so I can talk a little.  
But don't you know me? I am the poor child you  
wished were yours.'

'Look!' she chatted away. 'We are more than seven,  
we are twenty-one.' And to my astonishment I counted  
fourteen more buds.

'Only when the last one opens,' she went on,  
'do we wish that you will fly with us to Heaven,  
and you shall see how large and fine we grow in our  
flight.'

In the last bud there lies only a canary-bird, no bigger  
than a barley-corn,  
and a scarlet bull-finch, no bigger than a garnet.

Your mother sends them to let you know that you shall  
meet in Heaven  
all that you have loved, even the least.  
The dear little ones will fly back with us.

When the heart is lifted into glory, the innocent, earthly  
things  
which it has loved, cling to it as to a magnet. . . .'

'Hush!' whispered the sweet babbler.  
'I am betraying the secrets of Heaven's religion.'

I will tell you this more, that you shall see your horse  
if you long to.  
You shall seem to lay your hand on his neck.

In a cloud valley you shall see him browsing, carnations  
to the right and gilly-flowers to the left.

Would you ride him once more?  
Good! Heaven has wide plains.

It will please your mother to see that you have not  
forgotten her favourite,  
whom she has stroked so often.

She has told us that Brownie would come every day  
to her window,  
and gaze at her with his intelligent eyes until the kindly  
hand came forth.

Surely her heart will beat with joy at your ride on him,  
as she knows that yours rejoices  
when you tear up along one of the mountains of  
Thunder,  
or across one of the streams of Lightning.

Now I have spoken, now let the rose fold up,  
for I need rest after my work.  
This only yet: as soon as the last bud has opened,  
our work-cells will fall in, and we will hasten back to  
your mother  
with the heavenly clothing she is giving to her first-  
born.' "

A word of acknowledgment came from over the seas,  
*from Denmark*. A letter dated:

“ COPENHAGEN,  
7th July, 1845.

“ From the first moment that I saw you—in the realm of the spirits, in your poetical works—I have loved you. I have often thought what a joy it would be to meet you face to face.

“ But now the Norwegian students tell me that you are very ill; and from your last poem, *The Beautiful Family*, I see that you are yourself prepared to leave ere long.

“ Now I can be silent no longer, I feel as though I shall never be at peace if I cannot speak to you, if I shall not be able to tell you that I love you.

“ When I think of you, Wergeland, I am proud to be a human being. Here at last we have a man who looks death in the face, who sings like Gunnar while death is burrowing towards his heart. Here we have proof that immortality does exist, and that God has given to man a divine soul.

“ Wergeland! Let me thank you for this, and for all the beautiful hours that you have given me. Let me greet you as the greatest living poet, who in his works has brought before my mind's eye the picture of a northern granite rock, whereon grow palms and golden fruit of the south.

“ Would that this greeting may reach you alive! When you are gone all the world will be saying how great and glorious you were; I want to say it to yourself; you shall receive my respectful homage while you are yet on earth. And, although my voice be feeble, still it is a human voice; even though you should own no soul but mine, still you did own a human soul, which is the greatest thing that a man can conquer.

“ M. GOLDSCHMIDT.”

Happily this letter—from poet to poet in love—did reach Henrik Wergeland just in time. The last day in his life he had made a day of rest. The lines he wrote back, and sent with a lock of his hair, were not decipherable. But in the night between the 11th and 12th of July he opened his eyes and said:

“ Now I had such a sweet dream;  
I dreamt that I lay in my mother’s arms.”

His work-cell had collapsed, but his work cannot die, for it lies at the heart of human progress towards the realisation of a fuller, truer humanity.













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